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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 000282

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [IS](#) [IZ](#) [LE](#) [PREL](#) [RS](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: DFM SALTANOV ON POST-ANNAPOLIS CONFERENCE,
PALESTINIAN CRISIS, LEBANON, PERSIAN GULF

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a February 4 meeting with the Ambassador, DFM Saltanov expressed concern that interest in Russia's proposed post-Annapolis conference was waning. Russia hoped the Quartet members would follow through on their commitment to relay their proposals for the conference by the end of the week, but Saltanov recognized that Israel was worried that the conference would fail to generate momentum. Saltanov took on board the U.S. request that Moscow receive Abu Mazen in a show of political support for the Palestinian leader and asked for U.S. assistance in pressuring Israel to reconsider its restrictions on Russia's assistance to Abu Mazen. Saltanov was pessimistic about a political breakthrough in Lebanon and agreed that Syria was not living up to its commitment to help reach an agreement on a compromise presidential candidate. Saltanov also reviewed his proposal for the creation of a security organization in the Persian Gulf, Russian Acting Security Council Secretary Sobolev's trip to Saudi Arabia, and Jordanian King Abdullah's mid-February trip to Moscow. End summary.

Post-Annapolis Conference

¶2. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Saltanov initiated his February 4 meeting with the Ambassador by expressing concern that Russia's proposal for a follow-up conference in Moscow was losing momentum. Referring to the January 31 Quartet telephone conference call, Saltanov noted that the Quartet members agreed to provide Russia with their proposals for the conference, especially on the timing of the event, by the end of the week. Saltanov recognized that there was some hesitation on the conference in the Israeli government, noting that FM Livni neither said that Israel was for or against the conference when she was recently in Moscow. Saltanov added that Livni seemed personally skeptical of the idea. Saltanov stressed the importance of keeping the momentum from Annapolis and the need to make a decision on proceeding with the conference soon.

¶3. (C) When the Ambassador asked for more details on a possible agenda, Saltanov noted that Livni thought a conference that focused on the multilateral track would be more feasible. Saltanov said that, while the revival of the multilateral track should be raised in the Moscow conference, the GOR doubted Arab countries would agree to a meeting that did not address Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, Palestinian reconciliation, and other issues.

¶4. (C) Saltanov was not sure what it would take to get the Israelis on board with a Moscow conference, noting that Livni had made it clear to Russia that the Israeli government would face tremendous criticism at home if the conference failed to generate progress. Saltanov commented that Israel would more favorably view a conference if there was movement on the

Palestinian track, and agreed that a breakthrough in the political stalemate in Lebanon would also improve the atmosphere.

Palestinian Leadership Divide

¶5. (C) Saltanov reaffirmed Russia's strong support of President Mubarak's initiative to achieve a political reconciliation between Abu Mazen and Hamas, stressing that the ongoing crisis in the Palestinian leadership threatened to undermine the peace process. The Ambassador urged Russia to respond affirmatively to Abu Mazen's interest in visiting Moscow, noting that the Palestinian leader needed strong support from the international community, and particularly from Russia. Saltanov agreed, and noted that the GOR would most likely receive Abu Mazen to Moscow, but only after Russia's March 2 presidential elections.

¶6. (C) Saltanov told the Ambassador that Russia was prepared to provide additional humanitarian and other assistance to Abu Mazen and Gaza, but Israel's Ministry of Defense "at the last minute" raised objections to the GOR shipment of armored personnel carriers to Abu Mazen's government. Specifically, the GOI informed Russia that only one-half of the personnel carriers could be delivered to the Palestinian Authority and the vehicles had to be stripped of all weaponry. Saltanov asked the United States for assistance in urging the GOI to reconsider its decision, stressing that Putin did not see the point in supplying Abu Mazen with personnel carriers without any weaponry.

Lebanon

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¶7. (C) Saltanov was pessimistic about a breakthrough in the political crisis in Lebanon, although he stressed that Russia was pressing all parties, including Syria, to reach an agreement. He noted that the opposing factions would most likely miss the Arab League's February 11 deadline for an agreement on compromise candidate General Suleiman. Saltanov reiterated that Suleiman was the ideal candidate, pointing out his earlier success in deploying Lebanese troops to southern Lebanon.

¶8. (C) Saltanov said that some Lebanese groups were concerned that Suleiman's election to the presidency would offset the tenuous balance of political forces in the cabinet. However, Lebanon's constitution significantly limited the role and powers of the president, making him little more than a symbolic figure of national unity. Saltanov expressed concern that Lebanese political forces were trying "to solve everything in one basket," instead of taking a step-by-step approach. When asked, he said that Lebanese parliamentary faction leader Walid Jumblatt's January 29 visit to Moscow was uneventful.

¶9. (C) The Ambassador noted Egyptian and Saudi efforts to reach a consensus, but underscored the extremely negative role of Syria and Hezbollah. Saltanov agreed, noting that his recent trip to Damascus and other capitals in the region confirmed that while Syrian leaders underscored their commitment to a peaceful settlement in Lebanon, Syria had yet to take any practical steps in that direction. Saltanov said that other leaders were also dissatisfied with Syria's efforts.

¶10. (C) Saltanov suggested that if Syria had a guarantee that the Israeli-Syrian track and a discussion of the Golan Heights issue would be resumed, Syria could be willing to play a more helpful role in Lebanon. The Ambassador stressed that Syria has yet to follow through on its commitments on Lebanon following the Annapolis conference. Saltanov responded that it was "not a coincidence" that Syria agreed

to participate in Annapolis and to support the Lebanese consensus presidential candidate, but Israel's "hesitation" to support a Moscow conference (in which the Israeli-Syrian track could be revived) may be the cause for Syria's weak efforts in Lebanon.

Persian Gulf

¶11. (C) Turning to Saltanov's recent remarks at the Bahrain Civilization Dialogue, the Ambassador asked about the thinking behind his proposal for the creation of a security and cooperation organization in the Persian Gulf. Saltanov recognized that the creation of such an organization was a long-term goal, commenting that the international community should initially focus its efforts on Iraq and Iran, but stressed that some steps to establish a security organization could be taken in parallel. Saltanov clarified that the proposed security organization was not directed against any country. (Note: According to press reports, Saltanov said in Bahrain that, "interested parties should assume a number of obligations that will guarantee stability in the Gulf area. These obligations should include a refusal to use force, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and adherence to peaceful conflict settlement.")

¶12. (C) On Acting Security Council Secretary Sobolev's trip to Riyadh, Saltanov said that Sobolev had good meetings with Saudi leaders. The meetings touched on bilateral issues, including counter-terrorism, economic, and military cooperation. Saltanov pointed out that the purpose of the visit was not to sign any agreements, but to improve the bilateral dialogue. Saltanov thought that Sobolev's contact with Saudi National Security Advisor Prince Bandar would develop into a regular channel of communication.

¶13. (C) On Iraq, the Ambassador referred to Deputy Prime Minister Kudrin's recent assurances to him that Russia was finalizing the paperwork on debt relief and expressed appreciation for Russia's renewed efforts to quickly bring this issue to a close. Saltanov agreed that the agreement on debt relief would likely have a positive impact on Russian economic and investment interests in Iraq.

Jordan

¶14. (C) Saltanov confirmed King Abdullah's visit to Moscow on February 11, but provided no specifics on his meeting with GOR officials.

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